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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KCOR](#) [BF](#)
SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION ROUNDUP: MOMENTUM TO FNM AS PARTIES
HIT ISSUES

REF: A. NASSAU 516
[1](#)B. NASSAU 435

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires D. Brent Hardt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In the final run up to May 2 elections, violence has faded, replaced with isolated vote-buying allegations, though these are not expected to compromise outcomes. In its recently released party platform, the opposition Free National Movement (FNM) has promised to restrict foreign purchase of land, maintain a neutral foreign policy, and push good governance measures, including accession to anti-corruption treaties, ethical standards, open contracting and a freedom of information act. The ruling Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) continued to focus on its expanding international engagement, anchor developments on the outer islands, and popular social development programs. While the race is still too close to call, the FNM has clearly gained momentum in recent rallies and in early voting by police and military, making it a slight favorite to win power. The PLP privately concedes loss of national momentum, but continues to rely on influence in individual constituencies and better name recognition among its candidates. Regardless of which party wins, the U.S. can expect a strong bilateral partner. END SUMMARY.

FNM PROMISES OPEN GOVERNMENT; PLP FOCUSES ON ECONOMY

[1](#)2. (C) Just 10 days before elections, the political parties released their party platforms. While the late release is telling of the general focus on personalities over issues in Bahamian elections, key differences have emerged and the platforms support election themes. The FNM "Manifesto 2007" focuses on its good governance election theme, promising accession to anti-corruption treaties, ethical standards for elected representatives, open contracting and a freedom of information act. It also continues criticism of the PLP's "anchor project" development plans, promising not to sell off Bahamian land to foreign investors. On foreign policy, the Manifesto is vague, broadly promising non-intervention and regional cooperation, including a pledge to advocate for greater international support for Haiti. It does not contain the FNM's private indications to us that it intends to downgrade the status of the Bahamian mission in Cuba from an Embassy to a Consulate or to end the Cuban eye-care program. (Comment: FNM criticism of foreign investment is populist

politicking, playing on Bahamian fears that foreigners are buying up prime Bahamian lands. With a huge trade deficit, foreign investment is required to maintain the Bahamian balance of payments, and absent a miraculous rise of Bahamian industry, foreign investment will remain central to the Bahamian economy under either party. Foreign investment boomed under the FNM during its last term in office. End Comment.

13. (C) The PLP platform paper "Action Agenda 2007" is similarly broad-based, touting economic gains under PLP leadership and promising to continue plans to draw investors -- and needed infrastructure -- to outer islands in need of an economic boost. It also promises to continue the popular development of community-based initiatives, such as the successful and award-winning community policing program, while expanding social services. On foreign policy, the PLP promised to continue expanding its international influence and -- while not mentioning Cuba specifically -- lauded its new presence abroad under PLP rule. It also pledges new embassies in Geneva, Latin America and Africa as part of a more "progressive" foreign policy. Finally, it promised to pursue free trade agreements with the EU and US. (Comment: Given that the Government collects revenues mainly through import duties, free trade would require a major restructuring of the tax and government revenue systems -- contrary to another PLP pre-election promise. End Comment.)

CLOSE RACE STILL TENSE, LEADING TO PRE-ELECTION SHENANIGANS

14. (C) Following an early outbreak of violence (reftel A), campaigning has become more civil. While isolated incidents continue -- most recently a series of scuffles during early

polling -- the general mood is again respectful as candidates walk amongst rival groups and in the community without violence. In such a close race, however, people remain nervous and other shenanigans are replacing election violence in the fight for precious votes. There have been credible allegations of PLP vote-buying in at least three constituencies, with party workers offering between \$250 and \$2000 for votes. In one case, workers allegedly offered the cash in return for cell-phone camera pictures of PLP ballots, causing the parliamentary registrar in charge of voting to ban cell phones from polling stations. The PLP also alleges that the FNM is buying votes, but no press reports have supported these allegations. Political campaigns on both sides state candidly that they have been approached for money by some voters. Candidates have not been tied to vote-buying and these isolated events are not expected to compromise elections.

15. (C) Election day may bring some confrontations at polling places. Pol Chief attended a planning meeting of one of the FNM candidates in a battleground constituency where the candidate told his election day workers that he expected trouble at one of the two polling places in the constituency. He instructed his workers not to cause trouble, but with about 150 supporters outside each of the polling stations in his district on election day, confrontations are possible.

POSSIBLE RED TIDE?

16. (C) In a small nation dominated by personal relationships, most voters want to support the winning party and lay claim to post-election spoils. Having an opposition MP representing your district brings limited rewards for voters. For this reason, there is a history of late shifts in voting as one party emerges as a clear leader and voters rush to jump on the bandwagon. In this context, April 26th -- early voting for police and military -- was an important day in the campaign period. During early polling, Poloff noted an overwhelming number of red FNM flags, cars, posters and T-shirt wearing supporters at the polling stations. This perception was probably not lost on the logjam of potential bandwagon jumpers who paraded past polling stations all day

attempting to gauge the momentum.

¶17. (C) Regardless of neutral observations showing FNM momentum, each party scrambled to claim victory after early polling, though the tone of PLP spin was decidedly more somber. In discussion with Poloff, FNM Deputy Leader Symonette exuberantly claimed 80 percent of the early vote, and proudly claimed clear momentum based on more visible public support. PLP Minister of Education Sears also claimed victory, but with a more restrained explanation: "Don't judge by what you see on the street. The FNM may have more money, more flags and more T-shirts, but we have more homes. When you get into the constituency races, we have the lead. They are running as one man - Ingraham - who has great support, but we are running better candidates." These remarks echo Prime Minister Christie's surprising recent speech promising 24 specific constituency victories despite mounting FNM support: "Cars don't vote! Lamp posts don't vote! Bumper stickers don't vote! Posters don't vote! . . . You ga vote!"

COMMENT: STRONG, DEMOCRATIC PARTNER CERTAIN

¶18. (C) Sears' frank admissions, and Christie's surprising speech, tell the story of the election. The FNM is clearly gaining momentum and may now enjoy better broad-based support leading to election. If this were a presidential election, FNM leader Hubert Ingraham would win. However, constituency by constituency parliamentary match-ups are not as easy to determine, and the overall race is still too close to call. Ingraham's credibility as a decisive leader, the focus on scandal, and the promise to clean up government, has gained traction. The PLP has some individually strong candidates and better name recognition that offer the advantages of incumbency. The ruling party is banking that the strength and record of their individual candidates coupled with assiduous constituency work over the past five years will be sufficient to carry them to victory one constituency at a time. The outcome is uncertain, with Post currently

estimating over 1/3 of the constituencies up for grabs.

¶19. (C) What is certain is that the election will produce a strong democratic partner (reftel B). Both parties will support counter-drug and migrant interdiction operations and work closely with us to strengthen our Third Border against terrorism. On foreign policy, the FNM is likely to be less involved in Non-Aligned initiatives, and more focused on its interests in the U.S., while the PLP is likely to continue expanding The Bahamas international engagement as a strong NAM and CARICOM partner. The FNM's likely focus on good governance is urgently needed, and the potential withdrawal of PLP overtures toward Cuba under the FNM would be welcome. Post has maintained good working relationships with the PLP as evidenced by the Megaports and CSI initiatives, and has moved the government to rethink its approach to human rights votes at the UN. Whoever is elected, we will move quickly to press the new government for a rapid conclusion of a Proliferations Security Initiative agreement, urge their continued focus on improving airport security, and seek to resolve the future of The Bahamas Flight Information Region.
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